

Message Text

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ACTION HA-05

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10
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FM AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7861

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 03590

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, IR
SUBJ: PRISON HUNGER STRIKE IN IRAN AND REACTION

REF: A. TEHRAN 3039, B. STATE 77977

SUMMARY: EMBASSY HAS OBTAINED NAMES OF 14 ALLEGED QASR
PRISON HUNGER STRIKERS. GOI OFFICIALS DENY HUNGER STRIKE.
IN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER, JOURNALISTS ASK FOR AN END TO
PRESS CENSORSHIP. LOCAL CLERGY CONCERNED ABOUT NATIONAL
COUNCIL OF CHURCHES' CABLE TO COMMITTEE FOR DEFENSE OF
RIGHTS OF PRISONERS. END SUMMARY.

1. EMBASSY OBTAINED NAMES OF FOLLOWING 14 ALLEGED HUNGER
STRIKERS SECOND-HAND FROM MEMBER OF OPPOSITIONIST COMMITTEE
FOR THE DEFENSE OF RIGHTS OF PRISONERS, A SUBCOMMITTEE OF
THE COMMITTEE FOR THE DEFENSE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOM.
THEY ARE: MAHMOUD AHMADI, MEHDI ABRISHAMCHI, MUJTABAH
JAVID, MOHAMMAD MEHDI REZAZADEH, HASSAN TEYMARIAN, ALI AKBAR
MAHDAVI, MOKHTEZA BAHMAN AZAD, LOTFOLLAH MEYSANI, SEYFOLLAH
KAZEMIAN, EBRAHIM ZAKER, HUSSANHAJIPOUR,
HOSSEIN TERANI KIA, MASSOUD HAGGOU, ASHTARI
MASSOAD MUTAHEDI. OF THIS GROUP, ONLY MEYSANI (SOMETIMES
WRITTEN MEISSAMI) FAMILIAR TO US AS AGED ENGINEER WHO HAS
BEEN IN PRISON SEVERAL YEARS. OPPOSITIONIST SOURCE CLAIMS
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MEYSANI AND ONE OTHER HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY WEAKENED BY LOSS OF FOOD.
DESPITE UNF COMMITTEE'S CLAIMS AS TO SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF
PRISONERS INVOLVED, THIS DETAILED INFO ACCORDS MORE CLOSELY
WITH FIGURE OF "UP TO 20" PROVIDED REF A.

2. FOREIGN JOURNALIST WHO ASKED MFA COMMITTEE ON GUIDANCE
AND INFORMATION FOR DETAILS ON HUNGER STRIKE WAS TOLD BY MFA

SPOKESMAN PARVIZ ADLE THAT THERE WAS NO SUCH "STRIKE."
ABOUT A WEEK AGO, MINISTER OF INFORMATION HOMAYOUN ALSO TOLD
TWO FOREIGN JOURNALISTS HE KNEW OF NO STRIKE, BUT SAID
PRISONERS WERE FREE TO EAT OR NOT EAT AS THEY SAW FIT.
THERE HAS BEEN NO LOCAL PRESS PUBLICITY ABOUT MATTER, BUT
WE UNDERSTAND VERY CONFIDENTIALLY THAT A LARGE NUMBER OF
PERSIAN JOURNALISTS CONCERNED WITH THIS AND SIMILAR MATTERS
HAVE SENT SIGNED LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER CALLING FOR END TO
"PRESS CENSORSHIP."

3. EMBOFF WAS ASKED IF HE WOULD BE FREE TO MEET WITH NATIONAL
COUNCIL OF CHURCHES INTERNATIONAL OFFICIAL JOHN COLLINS FIRST
WEEKEND IN MAY. COLLINS, WHO IS COMING ON CHURCH-RELATED
BUSINESS, ALSO WANTS TO OBTAIN SOME BACKGROUND INFO ON IRAN.
EMBOFF AGREED TO MEET COLLINS.

4. FYI: AT LEAST TWO FOREIGN CHRISTIAN MINISTERS HERE
MILDLY CONCERNED THAT NATIONAL COUNCIL FELT IT NECESSARY
TO TAKE POSITION ON MATTER BEFORE CONSULTING CHRISTIAN
CHURCHES IN IRAN. EPISCOPAL MINISTER AND CHURCH COMMITTEE
FEEL THEIR FORTHCOMING BUILDING FUND CAMPAIGN MAY NOT APPEAR
TO IRANIANS IN MOST FAVORABLE LIGHT, AND THESE AND OTHERS FROM
PROTESTANT AND CATHOLIC CHURCHES ARE CONCERNED THAT WHAT WILL ALMOST
INEVITABLY BE VIEWED AS ANTI-IRAN GESTURE MAY ALSO COME TO
BE INTERPRETED AS ANTI-MOSLEM IN VIEW OF GROWING RELIGIOUS
TENSIONS, AND SET BACK SLOWLY-EVOLVING CHRISTIAN-MOSLEM TIES.
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IF DEPT HAS OPPORTUNITY TO BRIEF COLLINS BEFORE HE COMES TO
IRAN, LATTER GENERAL CONSIDERATION MIGHT BE BROUGHT TO HIS
ATTENTION WITHOUT IDENTIFYING SPECIFIC SOURCES OF CONCERN,
WHO WILL CERTAINLY HAVE A FEW WORDS OF THEIR OWN TO SAY ON
SUBJECT WHEN HE GETS HERE.
SULLIVAN

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